CLAIMS

1.   An information system accessible over a computer data network,
comprising:

a user e-mail client able to send and receive e-mail messages;

an e-mail server able to send and receive e-mail messages;

a computer data network intermediate to the user e-mail client
and the e-mail server;

a receiver for accepting e-mail messages over the computer
data network;

a topic and a qualifier disposed in said e-mail messages that
represent a reference information query;

a database for storing said topic and qualifier together with a
return address of the user e-mail client;

a scheduler for invoking previously scheduled, stored requests;

a plurality of topic servers for researching information that can
be used in said response, and that are selected according to said topic and
filtered by said qualifier;

a composer for constructing a responsive e-mail message with
information provided by one of the plurality of topic servers and that is sent to
said return address.

2.   The system of claim 1, further comprising:

an ad server connected to the composer and able to inject
advertisements for which a fee has been paid.

3.   The system of claim 1, wherein:

each one of the plurality of topic servers is specialized and
researches a single topic area.

4.   The system of claim 1, further comprising:

a webserver connected to the plurality of topic servers and the database, and having a HTTP connection to the Internet;

wherein, said topics and qualifiers can be delivered over the internet from a client browser, and said responses are composed as HTTP documents.

5.   The system of claim 1, further comprising:

a webserver connected to the plurality of topic servers and the database, and having a HTTP connection to the Internet;

wherein, said topics and qualifiers can be delivered over the internet from a wireless client using WAP, and said responses are composed as HTTP documents that are delivered back to a respective wireless device.

6.   The system of claim 1, wherein:

the composer selectively responses with either a plain text answer or an HTTP document that includes clickable hypertext that links to further information on said topic that can be browsed by a user.

7.   The system of claim 1, wherein:

said qualifier is remembered for each said user and is used as a default qualifier when a current query lacks a qualifier.

8.   The system of claim 1, wherein:

said qualifier represents a physical location of said user and responses to said topic are filtered according such physical location.

9.   An electronic query method for a network client, comprising:

entering a topic in the form of "topic@recipient.com" into a send-to address line of an e-mail question message;

entering a qualifier on a subject line of said e-mail question message that constrains said topic or entering a qualifier preceded by "Subject:" in the message body of said email question that constrains said topic;;

sending said e-mail question message via a mail server on the Internet to a recipient corresponding to one referenced in said "topic@recipient.com"; and

receiving an e-mail answer message with a message body from said recipient that includes an answer to a database query which assumed a question about said topic was asked and said qualifier is to be used as a constraint.

10.   An answering agent, comprising:

a plurality of incoming e-mail queries each with a "To:" field, a subject field, and a message body field;

a SMTP-server providing for receipt of said plurality of incoming e-mail queries;

a plurality of POP-mailboxes each corresponding to a topic that can be referred to in said "To:" field of a particular one of the plurality of incoming e-mail queries;

an answering-agent receiver that strips a topic and a qualifier from said plurality of incoming e-mail queries;

an answering-agent database for storing topics, qualifiers, and return addresses provided by the receiver;

an answering-agent scheduler for selecting a query in the database for response;

an answering-agent composer providing for an answer to said selected query to be generated within a message body field of a response;

a plurality of topic servers each responsive to a different query topic;

a plurality of outgoing e-mail answers that each include said answer in said message body field that corresponds to a respective one of the plurality of incoming e-mail queries; and

an action/transaction method providing a mechanism whereby email messages containing answers from one answering-agent can be replied-to or forwarded to another answering-agent to obtain additional information or to invoke other processes.

11.	The answering agent of claim 10, further comprising:

an advertisement server connected to insert an advertisement in each of said outgoing e-mail answers.

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12.	The answering agent of claim 10, further comprising:

an advertisement server connected to not insert an advertisement in a particular one of said outgoing e-mail answers if it is addressed to a user who has paid a subscription fee.